DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 776 HE 030 922

AUTHOR	Doring, Allan; Bingham, Bob; Bramwell-Vial, Ann
TITLE	Transition to University - A Self-Regulatory Approach.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (Brisbane, Australia, November 30-December 4, 1997).
AVAILABLE FROM	Australian Catholic University, P.O. Box 247, Everton Park, Queensland 4053, Australia.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; College Freshmen; Educational Counseling; Educationally Disadvantaged; Foreign Countries; Goal Orientation; High Risk Students; Higher Education; Intervention; *Self Efficacy; Self Motivation; *Student College Relationship; *Student Motivation; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; Australian Catholic University; *Student Support Services

ABSTRACT

As part of an ongoing project being conducted at Australian Catholic University (Brisbane), this paper examines the idea of self-regulation as an inherent component of a student's transition to higher education and as a means of increasing the understanding of student difficulties, particularly academic problems. It also examines whether self-regulatory behavior can be fostered as part of the overall academic process. Self-regulation theory focuses on how students personally activate, alter, and sustain their learning practices, and self-regulated students use learning processes that involve goal-directed activities. The report examines approaches such as reflective self-monitoring to evaluate its contribution to self-regulation and academic development, and suggests several tasks that serve this function. Also examined is the need for a transition process that will provide the skills for student self-efficacy and confidence--an approach which requires an active role on the part of the institution. It is noted that universities should be prepared to teach and encourage appropriate learning behavior and provide integrated intervention for students. (Contains 10 references.) (JLS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 415 776

Transition to university - a self-regulatory approach

Allan Doring
Bob Bingham
Ann Bramwell-Vial

Australian Catholic University
McAuley Campus
Brisbane

Paper presented to the Annual Conference,
Australian Association for
Research in Education
November 30 - December 4, 1997
Brisbane.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IR 030 922

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Allan Doring
Bob Bingham
Ann Bramwell-Vial
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Transition to university - a self-regulatory approach

Allan Doring Bob Bingham Ann Bramwell-Vial

Within universities, expanding first year enrolments and lower academic entry levels have further increased the diversity of students' backgrounds. Much of the literature suggests that the transition to university is often problematic requiring significant social and academic adjustments on the individual's part (McInnis and James (1995), Burroughs-Lane (1996) and Trindle (1996). Poor coping can lead to ongoing academic and social difficulties including eventual failure or withdrawal.

It is argued that students who make a successful transition to university are competent in their self-regulatory behaviour especially in three important components: goals, self-efficacy and learning strategies (Schunk, 1993). The student who is able to self-regulate their learning behaviour is more likely to cope while those with low self-regulation likely to suffer stress from poor handling of competing priorities and/or poor learning behaviour.

As part of an ongoing project, this paper examines the notion of self-regulation as an inherent component of a student's transition to university and as a means of increasing the understanding of student difficulties, particularly in the academic area. It also examines whether self regulatory behaviour can be fostered as part of the overall academic process. Standard tasks such as reflective self monitoring are evaluated in terms of their contribution to self-regulation and academic development. The use of additional tasks which serve this function is then discussed.

Transition to university - a self-regulatory approach

Allan Doring Bob Bingham Ann Bramwell-Vial

Introduction

Transition to university is increasingly problematic often requiring significant social and academic adjustments by students (McInnis and James, 1995; Burroughs-Lane, 1996 and Trindle, 1996). With expanding university enrolments and increased diversity of student background and preparedness for university, this problem appears exacerbated.

Success in terms of academic achievement in a university environment is strongly linked to the degree of and success in the adoption of appropriate learning strategies that the effective learner is capable of achieving (Lindner and Harris, 1992; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1986, Bandura, 1982, Schunk, 1984, 1993). For some students, this may require a change to particular aspects of learning behaviours that they previously found successful. For them, the transition process becomes critical.

Prior to entering university, students, particularly recent school-leavers, will have a history of learning which may involve a significant degree of external environmental guidance and support particularly from parents and teachers (Glasser, 1996:305). This guidance and support is likely to include external controls, external motivation, goal setting, set activities and precise expectations.

These external influences, together with each student's internalised view of their own competence, will be evident in a range of academic behaviours, learning strategies and goal orientations. While some are likely to be aware of the overt and covert differences between their previous learning environment and university and acknowledge that difference may warrant changes in their learning behaviour, others may not. It is these students that are more likely to be at risk and therefore needing particular assistance if they are to be successful in their university studies.

Awareness of the different demands does not necessarily indicate a preparedness to make changes of the required nature to cope with the autonomy and independence in relation to the learning process (Cuthbert, 1995; Boud, 1988).

In addition to a set of beliefs and goals underlying their about-to-begin university study career, students entering university also bring diverse levels of skills. Over time, these beliefs and skills have evolved through the triadic reciprocal determinism of three influencing processes: person (self), behaviour and environment (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989). While an individual's personal, behavioural and environmental events can be viewed as separable, they are interdependent sources of influence in analyses of human behaviour (Zimmerman, 1990a:181). It is this interdependence of influences that must be kept in mind when examining the issue of student learning behaviour.

Transition

Enrolment in university study is not simple. For the school-leaver, the path through such competing demands previously may have been lessened through the influence of school and home. As a young adult, he or she is probably expected to take considerably more responsibility for themselves and their actions.

As recorded in various studies (i.e. Blunden, 1996; Trindle, 1996), students beginning university study are likely to experience a wide range of problems ranging from confusion about self and institutional organisation, the need for greater autonomy, the emergent tension between their expectations (which might be vague, contradictory) and the university's expectations, which are usually very precise, formal and imposed impersonally. As they try to desperately adjust, many are reluctant to make the effort to check, clarify or reduce the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

To date, universities have generally seen their role in the transition process as interventionist. If and when learning difficulties are experienced or acknowledged, students are encouraged, or even left to their own devices, to identify their weaknesses and seek assistance or remediation from the university sponsored study skill centre or equivalent. Anecdotal comments suggest that often such centres attract the students least likely to need assistance whereas the student needing help, rarely takes the opportunity. Such centres are often sources of coping techniques and low level support, for example, study skills, rather than a source of developing processes to

meet the demands associated with student university life. In this regard, these centres could be seen as defacto support systems.

The transition to university process is characteristised by a decrease in previous environmental supports. There is an increased expectation to become an autonomous and independent learner (Boud, 1990). The initial intention and purpose of students beginning their university courses, is to complete a degree. As they become aware of the inherent pressures associated with university study, including competing demands of meeting academic requirements, a desire for a social life and the need for part-time work, a more immediate goal might become the successful completion of a semester's work, that is, to do the minimum work to gain a pass. To attain even this goal, a higher level of self organisation and discipline is required to even identify priorities and attain weekly goals. This may require the rapid development of appropriate practice, self-monitoring, improved self-regulatory skills and the identification and discrimination of standards and criteria for achieving acceptable levels of performance (Glasser, 1996:305).

As they recognise changing demands for new situations, there is an impetus for the student to adopt new behaviour or change personal aspects of their present. Of particular interest here is the student who, during the transition phase, becomes aware of the need to change their approach to learning, particularly in terms of the goals they set. The need to possibly redefine their goals is seen as a critical aspect of learning behaviour change. It is in this regard that the self-regulation literature has something to offer.

Self-regulation

The literature on self-regulation implies that it is during the transitional process beginning after initial entry, that the university student who is an effective self-regulated learner is more likely to make any successful or necessary adjustments to his or her learning processes (Zimmerman & Pons, 1986; Schunk, 1993).

Self regulation theory focuses attention on how students personally activate, alter and sustain their learning practices in specific contexts (Zimmerman, 1986:307). This perspective has directed attention to students' use of a variety of specific sub-processes to achieve self-designated goals in a real world context. However, there appears a dearth of application to the neophyte university student. While there is a growing body of applied research on the relationship between self-regulated learning processes and student academic achievement (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1984), this particular group appears to have been largely ignored.

Self-regulatory students use learning processes involving goal-directed activities that investigate, modify and sustain their performance (Zimmerman, 1989). These activities include attending to instruction, processing and integrating knowledge, rehearsing information to be remembered, and developing and maintaining positive beliefs about learning capabilities and anticipated outcomes of actions (Schunk, 1989, 1990). The literature on self-regulated learning (i.e. Zimmerman, 1990b; Lindher & Harris, 1992) indicates that self-regulated learners understand, value and engage in

academic learning in ways that are fundamentally different that their peers who have difficulty .

Social cognitive learning theory framework generally views self-regulation as comprising three sub-processes: self-observation, self-judgement and self-reaction (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1989). As students undertake learning tasks with particular goals, they observe their performances, evaluate or judge their goal progress. As an outcome of this self-monitoring, they continue their work or change their task approach (Schunk, 1990:72). It is accepted that satisfactory self-regulation will not only assist the transition process but also enhance feeling of efficacy thus leading to higher levels of achievement and motivation.

During this phase, as they self-monitor their transition, students not adjusting may need to move beyond their present level of awareness of themselves as learners. They may also need to recognise the changing situation and examine the kinds of processes that they have previously utilised in their learning. Until this self-judgment and self-reaction are recognised and identified, a commitment to changing their self-regulation skills, which in turn affects their goal achievement and self-efficacy, might not be attempted.

Goal setting

Observation suggests that students' ability to self-regulate through setting appropriate individual goals to meet external goals and demands varies greatly. Not only does the

degree of self-regulation vary greatly but also, already fragile self-efficacy is lowered further through inability to adopt the best tactics and strategies to cope with these demands. It is important to understand self-regulatory processes to assist students' to change their learning strategies while increasing their motivation to do so (Zimmerman and Pons, 1986).

Deliberately teaching for effective goal setting and self-regulated learning seems a valid objective for value added education early in university studies. Numerous studies, (i.e., Schunk, 1984; Bandura and Schunk, 1981), examine how self-regulated learning processes affect academic beliefs, skills and behaviours.

Goal setting, goal specificity, goal proximity, goal difficulty and goal progress feedback have been associated with self-regulated learning (Schunk, 1990, 1993, Bandura and Schunk, 1981). It is believed that if inappropriate goals are set, then other components of the self-regulation are likely to become inefficient. The application of inappropriate tactics and strategies is likely to hinder rather than help goal attainment as well as incur other effects. For example, self-efficacy is only likely to increase as students note progress, attain goals and set new challenges (Schunk, 1990:81).

If the transition process to university is to be successful, the student will need to utilise appropriate tactics and strategies to meet changing goals, especially those imposed by the university. Those high in self-efficacy and confident in their ability to

self-regulate, will, through observation, judgement and reaction, monitor their own performance and make adjustments.

Implications

For many students, the transition process is frequently left to fate. A *Sink or swim* mentality attempts to force a situation that is often personally and economically wasteful without addressing the real issues and responsibility. Even for the student who is able to adjust, any change process is by default and thus may be extremely inefficient both for the individual student and their learning behaviour.

To date, universities' concerns with student difficulties appear to have seen several interventions invoked, particularly through the establishment of study skill centres, optional intensive workshops and availability of counselling services. As mentioned earlier, experience suggests that the students most in need of such assistance are also those least likely to approach and utilise the opportunity. The question arises as to whether universities are or should be, prepared to teach and encourage appropriate learning behaviour among their commencing students or over the duration of their degree.

Current intervention approaches within universities are often limited in focus and duration as well as suffering the shortcomings referred to above. Where attempts have been made, the work of one section, e.g. the study centres, is often not integrated with the unit teaching. On the basis of the points raised in this paper, it is argued that there

is a real need to integrate and embed self-regulation skills in academic units rather than as stand alone courses. Of course this then puts added responsibility on the part of university teaching staff to provide understanding and practice in areas such as strategies, tactics and techniques, that is, they have to teach for changes in thinking, behaviour and content knowledge.

In summary, the underlying issue appears to be one of balancing individual and institutional responsibility. Should there be in-unit assistance, that is, transition skills, embedded in each units, particularly those with high first year student enrolment ? A second and allied question refers to what is the likely value of the tasks already embedded in units that will help transition ? Can and should academic staff teach skills of independent learning in order to deliberately change learning styles and hence increase the likelihood of student success and retention?

References

Educational Psychologist, 25(1), 71-86.

Schunk, D. H. (1993). *Enhancing strategy use: Influences of strategy value and goal orientation.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, April.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37*, 122-147.

Trindl, E. (1996). Catering for an undergraduate: Transition to university. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association, 7*, 3-22.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1986). Becoming a self-regulated learner: Which are the key sub-processes? *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 11*, 307-313.

Bandura, A. & Schunk, D. H. (1981). Cultivatinging.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning *Journal of Educational Psychology, 81*, 329-339.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1990a). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist, 25*(1), 3-17.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1990b). Self-regulating academic learning and achievement: The emergence of a social cognitive perspective. *Educational Psychology Review, 2*, 173-201.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Zimmerman, B. J. & Martinez-Pons, M. (1986). Development of a structured interview for assessing students' use of self-regulated learning strategies. *American Educational Research Journal*, 23, 614-628.

E-mail contact details:
A.Doring@mcauley.acu.edu.au
B.Bingham@mcauley.acu.edu.au
A.Bramwell-Vial@mcauley.acu.edu.au